

DEATH

A TRAVELLER'S GUIDE



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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
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The First Stage

The Primary Clear Light of Pure Reality	3
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The Second Clear Light	4
------------------------	---

The Second Stage

The Experiencing of Reality in the Thought Body	5
---	---

The Third Stage

Seeking Rebirth	8
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Appendix

Transference	18
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Introduction

The circumstances that brought me to undertake this work were the terrible illness and death of my step-father. I felt very strongly that he needed, or at least I wanted to give him some form of map or guide to aid him through the dying process and to assuage his, and my own, fear of death.

I must admit that his trial was the first time in my life that I was made to face Death so squarely. And so I was driven on by my own fear of death and by compassion for his suffering.

It was to these ends that I determined to make a serious study of the Bardo Thödol, popularly known as the The Tibetan Book of the Dead. I had attempted to master an early Evans-Wentz edition of the work as a young student, and while appreciating the breathe and depth of the work and it's commentaries, I was ultimately defeated by the difficulty of the central text itself.

Now returning to the project years later and with a clear purpose, I set about systematically breaking down the Evans-Wentz text. My analysis revealed many valuable insights but also considerable obstacles to my goal of making the knowledge within the book available to my step-father. I realised that in its present form the text would be unles to him.

Although an intelligent and good-hearted person I knew that my step-father would find the text both strange and tedious. The Bardo Thödol is uniquely embedded, both in language and picture symbolism, within a Tibetan cultural idiom. He had himself been disenchanted with religion and spiritual matters generally by his earliest experiences with the Christian church, so the archaic quasi-biblical style of the English rendering would alienate him further. In addition, the text contains considerable repetition, restatement and includes numerous digressions, which make the work itself quite difficult to read. All these things would have combined to make the text unpalatable to my step-father.

Yet, despite all these difficulties the value of the book was undeniable. It seemed to me, in spite of my own healthy scepticism, that the work resonated with a great truth. The text had the authority that comes from a 'scientific' rigor and from lived experience.

It became clear to me that behind the Bardo Thödol lay a science of consciousness, what in the Western tradition might be called an existential phenomenology. Moreover, to my specific purpose, the analysis revealed a coherent sequence of experiences that one might expect in the death process, in addition to specific sets of instructions and several meditative exercises to be used, as required, through the death experience. Thus there was indeed a narrative thread that I could distil from the morass of material and that would function as the map or guide that I was seeking.

I set about the delicate task of editing the Bardo Thödol. Firstly I transposed it from its quasi-biblical form into a more modern English. I edited out unnecessary digressions, repetition or restatement and added any useful explanatory footnotes into the main body of the text. I also attempted to edit out any uniquely Tibetan references with the understanding that an individual will make sense of these experiences through their own psycho-cultural matrix. However, I did retain the term Bardo as the most elegant way to designate a state of consciousness; using it interchangeably with In-Between or Intermediate State. There are several Bardo: this text deals with those from death to rebirth.

I also retained the original rendering whenever the majesty and poetic power of the text was necessary to adequately describe an experience.

Through the editing process I came into contact with another version of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, written by Drs Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert, entitled The Psychedelic Experience. The Leary text was remarkable for its insight and clarity and in many ways already bridged the gap between the esoteric Tibetan tradition and a contemporary Western psychology. I decided to include excerpts from The Psychedelic Experience in the body of this work wherever appropriate and have noted these additions with an asterisk (*).

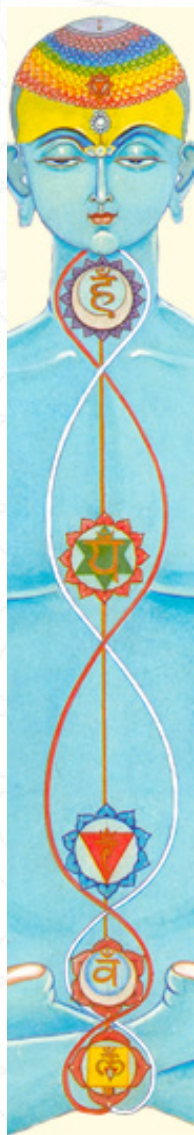
Thus, now some years later, I humbly offer up this imperfect work to anyone who may benefit from it.

Peace to you. May love, kindness and compassion increase.

Michael R., 2012

When the expiration has ceased, the vital-force will have sunk into the Nerve-Centre of Wisdom and the Knower will be experiencing the Clear Light of the natural condition.

The Psychic Nerve-Centre of Wisdom is located in the heart. The Knower is the mind in its knowing, or cognising functions.



The experience of the Clear Light induces an ecstatic condition of consciousness such as saints and mystics of the West have called Illumination.

This is the awareness of energy transformations with no imposition of mental categories ... the ego-transcendent state ... enjoy(ing) a condition of balance, of perfect equilibrium, and of oneness.*

If the person recognises the Clear Light of Pure Reality and abides in it they obtain the Divine Body of Truth.

At this moment called death, the glimpsing of the Clear Light of Reality is experienced by ALL sentient beings.

The dying person should recognise that their own intellect, unobstructed, shining, thrilling and blissful is identical with the Boundless Clear Light of Pure Reality, the All-Good. Union of them is the state of Perfect Enlightenment.

One will experience a glimpse of the Pure Truth, subtle, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious ... like a mirage moving across a landscape in one continuous stream of vibrations. This is the radiance of one's true nature. Recognise it! From the midst of that radiance, the natural sound of Reality, reverberating like a thousand thunders simultaneously sounding will come. This is the natural sound of one's own self. Do not be afraid.

However, unfamiliar with the blissful state of the Clear Light, the consciousness of the average human being lacks the power to stay in it. Karmic propensities becloud the consciousness-principle with thoughts of personality, of individualised being, of duality*. Thus, losing equilibrium, consciousness falls away from the Clear Light of Pure Reality.

If one can not hold fast in the ecstasy of the Primary Clear Light of Pure Reality do not be afraid, that which is called the Secondary Clear Light will dawn.

The Secondary Clear Light is less intense than the Radiance of the Primary Clear Light of Pure Reality. Yet, if the deceased can recognise the Clear Light in this stage the intellect is awakened and Liberation is attained.

In this stage a dialogue occurs between pure transcendence and the awareness that this ecstatic vision is happening to oneself.

(This movement) ... between pure ego-loss unity, and lucid, non-game selfhood produces an intellectual ecstasy and understanding that defies description.

Thus, in this secondary stage of the First Bardo, there is possible both the Mystic Non-Self and the Mystic Self-Experience.*



If the deceased has not been liberated through recognition of the Primary or Secondary Clear Light, what is called the State of the Moments of Death - The Period of Ego-Loss or Non-Game Escasy* is ended and the next stage, the State of the Experiencing of Reality, will dawn.

The Bardo body, formed of matter in an ethereal-like state, is an exact duplicate of the human body from which it is separated in the process of death. Retained in the Bardo body are the consciousness-principle and the psychic nerve-system.

While in this state one's body is of the nature of that called the shining illusory-body, thought-body or desire-body.

In this stage the person experiences a state of great lucidity.

The consciousness-principle is not usually resident in the body all the while. Normally it quits the body at the moment called death, holding a subtle magnetic-like relationship with the physical body.

The death process is the reverse of the birth process. In both alike, there is a passing from one state of consciousness into another. Just as a babe must wake up in this world and through experience learn the nature of this world, so likewise, a person at death must wake up in the Bardo world (Intermediate or In-Between State) and become familiar with it's own peculiar conditions.



After a time, when the consciousness-principle finds itself outside the body, it says to itself: "What has happened? Am I dead? Or not?" It may not be able to determine which.

The deceased sees its friends and relatives much as it had been used to seeing them before. The deceased may see that their body is being prepared for the funeral, may see and hear the grief of their friends and family. The deceased may wish to communicate with them but cannot and so become distressed.

In this hour one must have great courage. Death comes to all. Honour your loved ones but one should not cling in fondness to this life when that which is called death has come.

About this time, sounds, lights, and rays – all three – are experienced. These things may awe, frighten, and terrify, causing much fatigue.

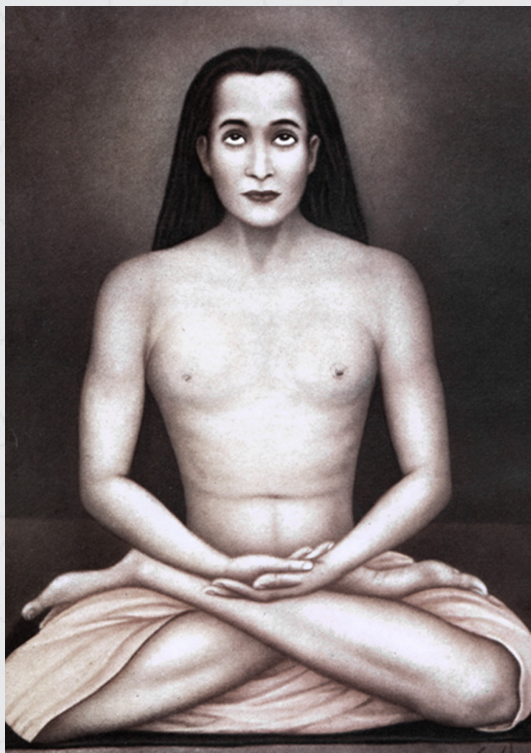
The underlying problem of the second ... (stage) is that any and every shape - human, divine, diabolical, heroic, evil, animal, thing – which the human mind can conjure or past life recall, can present itself to consciousness: shapes and forms and sounds whirling by endlessly.*

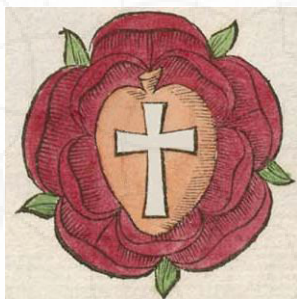


Let go of fear, anger, pride. Reside in a peaceful detached and joyful state. It is sufficient for the deceased to realise that one is in the In-Between State, and that these apparitions, beautiful and terrible both, are none other than one's own thought-forms.

The body which the deceased now has is called the thought-body of propensities (conditioned; habit created through worldly existence). The person must know that this is no material body of flesh and blood. Whatever may come is unable to harm them.

If the deceased should become distressed by the awe-inspiring visions and sounds that appear to them, they should earnestly concentrate their mind on a divine or angelic personage for whom they have great devotion. The person may meditate upon the divine figure as if they were a being with a physical body bathed in a halo of brilliant rainbow light. In humble and earnest prayer request protection and guidance from the divine personage. This will certainly be granted and one will merge in the halo of rainbow light, obtaining enlightenment in a Body of Bliss.





Recognise that the radiances of the apparitions, issuing from within one's own heart, being the product of one's own pure love, has come to shine.

Recognise this!

All these are the radiances of one's own intellectual faculties come to shine. They have not come from any other place. Do not be repelled nor attracted by them. Have courage. Do not be afraid.

Abide in the mood of perfect tranquillity. In that state all the forms and radiances will merge into one's self and Liberation will be obtained.

Along with the radiances of Wisdom, the dull impure illusory lights of the six Lokas (worlds, dimensions, planes of consciousness) will also come to shine.

If one is frightened by the pure radiances of Wisdom and attracted by the impure lights of the six Lokas, then one will assume a body in any of the six planes of consciousness.

The Intermediate State When Seeking Rebirth.

The Period of Re-Entry.*

This body, born of desire, is a thought-form in the Intermediate State. The desire-body resembles the former human body of flesh and blood but is also endowed with certain signs and beauties of perfection such as beings of higher destiny possess.

At this time visions of one's future place of birth will appear. The deceased is implored not to follow these visions. Do not be attracted by them. Although up until this day one was not able to recognise the Clear Light and abide in it. Now if one is able to hold fast to the Truth and allow the mind to rest undistractedly in the *nothing-to-do*, *nothing-to-hold* condition of the unobscured state of your intellect, one will yet obtain Liberation without having to enter the womb-door.



However, if unable to know yourself, then, meditate again on a divine or angelic personage. Meditate on them in a state of great devotion and humble trust, as overshadowing the crown of your head.

This is of great importance. Do not be distracted.

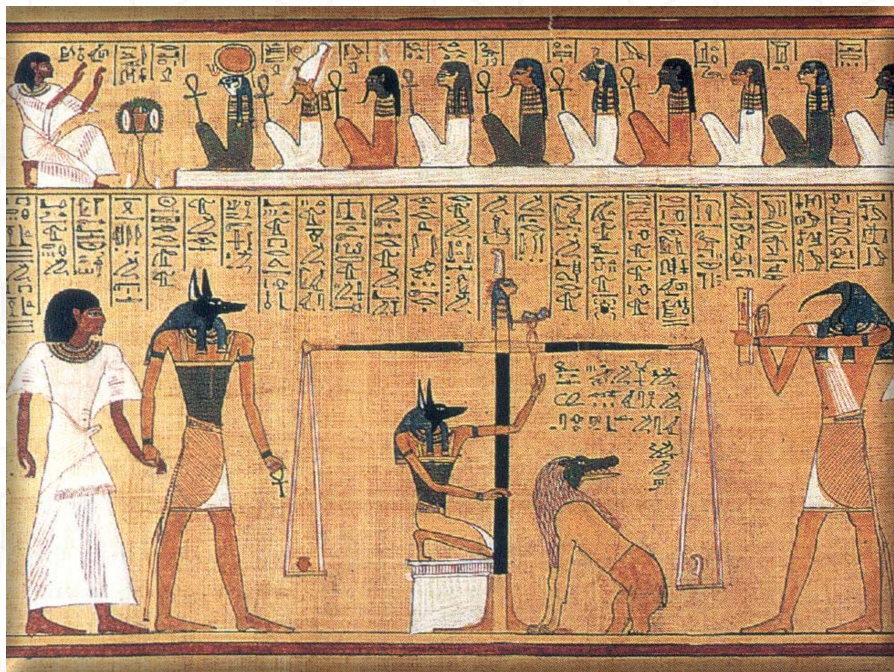
The deceased, dwelling in this desire-body, is endowed with all sense faculties. That is to say whether one was blind, deaf, or lame when living, on this After-Death Plane all the sense organs are unimpaired and very keen and complete.

This condition is an indication that one is indeed deceased and wandering in the In-Between State. Act so as to know this. Remember the teachings; remember this teaching!

In the desire-body, the intellect having been separated from its seat [the physical body], experiences unimpeded motion. One may move through mountains unimpeded; one can instantaneously arrive in whatever place one wishes; one can fly in the sky and more ...

These powers are not the fruit of any Samadhi (meditation). They are another sign that one is wandering in the In-Between State. Do not desire them. One has the ability to exercise them unimpededly, through Sadhana (spiritual practice), in Samadhi, now, at this moment. Know this!

After a time, one must undergo the Judgement of one's own Conscience: the summing up of one's good and bad deed's. One's Conscience is stern, impartial and a guardian of righteousness. Wherein, one may become greatly frightened and will tremble, trying lamely to justify one's past actions.



Meditate upon the Clear Light of Pure Reality. *If unable to meditate then merely analyse with great attention the nature of that which one is experiencing.*

At this time if the deceased looks into water, or into a mirror, they will not see any reflection of the face or body; nor does the body cast any shadow. These are signs that one is wandering in the In-Between State.

Recognise that one's intellect in this state, having no firm object whereon to depend, being continuously in motion, whatever thought occurs to one now – be it pious or impious – will wield great power. Therefore do not think impious thoughts, but recall any devotional exercises that one practiced in life.



Whatever one
to pass. Do not dwell
which might turn the
Remember one's relationship

desires will come
upon evil actions
course of the mind.
with truly spiritual persons

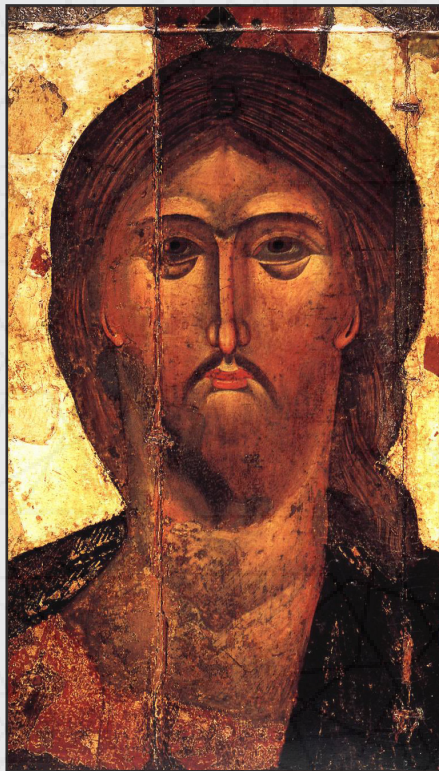
while in the human world and persevere in going on with good
acts. This is essential. Do not be distracted. Hold fast to this one single purpose.

If the deceased has been unable to 'awaken' and recognise the In-Between State, after a time, the body of the past life will become more and more dim and the body of the future life will become more and more clear.

Saddened by this the deceased may think "Oh what misery is this! I must seek a body!" Thinking so, one is thrown into disorder. At this time the lights of the six Lokas will shine strongly upon one. The light of that 'place' wherein the person is to be born, will shine most prominently. One's own body will partake of the colour of this light.

Listen well. The special art of these teachings is especially important at this moment: whichever light shines upon one now, meditate upon it as being the Compassionate One (the Savior; or a divine, angelic personage). From whatever place the light comes, consider that place to be this divine figure. This is an exceedingly profound art. It prevents re-incarnation.

Meditate on this divine personage for a long time, but as being apparent, not existent materially. This is called the pure illusory form. Then let the visualisation of the divine figure melt away from the extremities, till nothing at all remains visible of it and put one's self in the state of the Clear Light – which one can not conceive as something- and abide in that state for a little while. Again meditate upon the divine personage; again meditate upon the Clear Light. Do this alternately. Afterwards, allow one's own intellect also to melt away gradually, beginning from the extremities.



Abide tranquilly in the uncreated state of the Divine Body of Truth. In that state birth will be obstructed and Perfect Enlightenment gained.



At some time, the deceased will see visions of males and females in union. When seeing them remember to withhold one's self from going between them. Regard the man as one's spiritual teacher and the woman as the Divine Mother - the Creative Forces. Meditate upon them and humbly bow down before them. Offer up worship and request spiritual guidance from them.

Still, if it is not closed even by this and the deceased finds himself ready to enter the womb, this (the third) method of repelling attachment and repulsion is to be practiced.

If, when the visions of the males and females in sexual union appear, the person is to be born as a male, the feeling of itself being a male dawns on the Knower, and the feeling of intense hatred towards the father and of jealousy and attraction towards the mother is experienced. If about to be born female, the feeling of being a female dawns on the Knower, and the feeling of intense hatred towards the mother and attraction and fondness towards the father is experienced.

Just at the moment when the sperm and the ovum are about to unite – the Knower experiences ***the bliss of the Simultaneously-Born State***, during which state it faints away into unconsciousness. Afterwards it finds itself encased in oval form, in the embryonic state, and upon emerging from the womb and opening its eyes to find itself reborn.

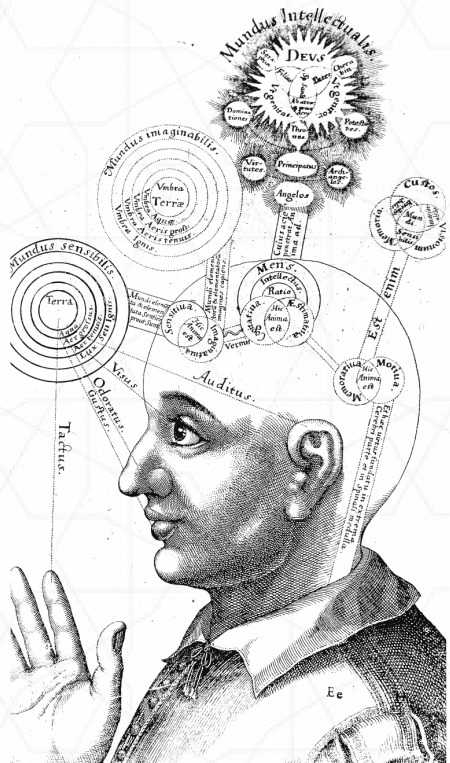
Reject the feelings of attraction or repulsion. Abandon jealousy and meditate on a divine personage or angelic being.

If again this does not close the womb-door and one finds oneself ready to enter the womb, then by means of the teaching called '*The Untrue and the Illusory*' the womb should be closed.

The deceased should at last come to recognised that the pair, male and female, like the clashing sounds, the beautiful and terrifying apparitions experienced before, are all, in their true nature, thought-forms: dream-like, like a mirage, like an echo, like the moon seen reflected in water.

If one holds one-pointedly to that train of thought, the belief that they are 'solid' is dissipated; and, that being impressed deeply upon the inner continuity of one's consciousness, one turns backwards and the womb-door is closed.

If still even when this is done, the idea of holding phenomena as 'solid, fixed, separate' remains undissolved and one remains ready to enter into the womb, meditate again upon the Clear Light. Meditating thus allows the mind to rest in the uncreated state – like the pouring of water into water. The mind, allowed its own easy mental posture, its natural condition, clear and vibrant, will close the womb-door.



Understand that the person in the In-Between State, possesses, to varying degrees, supernormal power of perception such as: supernormal sight and hearing; clairvoyance; knowledge of miraculous power; recollection of former existences; prescience and knowledge of the destruction of passions. Whatever of this profound teaching is remembered or spoken to the deceased, in this state, will be apprehended.

Nevertheless, there are many persons who, due to the great force of past experiences, fail to remain one-pointed and the womb-door will not be closed.

Therefore ***this next teaching is for the selection of a womb-door.***

If at this stage the deceased has not been able to successfully apply the methods given above: Liberation has not been attained nor the womb-door closed; it is almost time to assume a body. One should make the selection according to this teaching.

Now the signs and characteristics of the place of birth will come. Recognise them. In observing the place of birth, choose the place well; choose the place where spirituality predominates. Exert great energy in making this choice.

At this time one may feel driven on by tormenting furies and terrifying storms - the thought of fleeing from them will arise.



If at this time one seeks refuge, because of fear, by hiding inside one of the above mentioned places and fearing to come out therefrom, one will feel greatly attracted to one's place of refuge (which is the womb) and in this way may assume an undesirable body. Do not be afraid.

If awed and terrified by these things one should instantaneously visualise a divine or angelic personage, perfect in form, huge of body, of massive limbs, capable of reducing to dust all mischievous spirits. Visualise this divine figure well. The power of their grace will separate the deceased from the tormenting furies and they will obtain the power to select the womb-door. This is a vital art of the profound teaching, therefore bear it thoroughly well in mind.



Even at this time in the Inbetween State, if one can recollect the teachings concerning the nature of the Clear Light of Pure Reality, this is best. If one is not trained in this, instruct the mind into regarding all 'things' as 'events,' as impermanent, flowing: maya. If this is impossible, practice tranquil non-attachment. By one-pointed meditating upon a divine or angelic personage, Liberation will be obtained in the Body of Bliss.

If in this 'final hour' one earnestly seeks Liberation one should think as follows: "How sorrowful it is that I, after innumerable ages, until now, have been wandering in the endless round of birth, death and rebirth; conditioned by these experiences. How painful that I have not yet been liberated by recognising the Clear Light of Pure Consciousness to be Self. How this wandering wearies me. Now has come the time to end this cycle! I myself will act as to be born with the angelic beings of light, at the feet of the Compassionate One: the divine creative power." By doing so, birth in these heavenly realms will take place.

If, however, one must, due to the influence of past experiences, enter into a womb, do not enter into any sort of womb which may come by. As now, in the In-Between State, the deceased possesses some measure of the supernormal power of foreknowledge, in a series of visions the Knower will become aware of 'the lot,' the conditions, associated with each womb. One must choose accordingly.

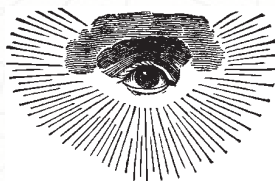
If birth is to be in the impregnated womb, a sensation that it is sweet-smelling will attract one and birth will be obtained thereby. Practise non-attachment and direct the will as follows: "I ought to be highborn, into a good and noble House; into an enlightened family: so as to be able to best serve all sentient beings."

Thinking in this way, directing one's wish, enter into the womb. At the same time, project intense loving-kindness upon the womb which one is entering. Be free of attraction or repulsion by the womb. To enter in the mood of complete impartiality is the most profound of arts.

This Doctrine is one which liberates by being experienced, without absolute need of prior meditation or other spiritual practice. This Profound Teaching liberates even those of great negative experiences through the Secret Pathway (Transference). One should not forget these words and their meaning, even though pursued by seven hellhounds!

Were the angels to seek it, they could not find any teachings transcending this one.

Thus is completed the profound teaching called the Bardo Thödol, which liberates embodied beings.

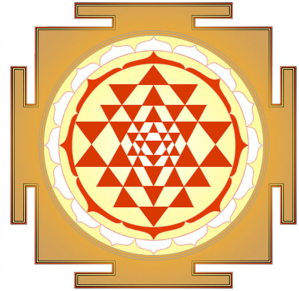


Appendix

When the breathing is about to cease, it is best if one practises the *Transference*.

The Transference successfully applied will prevent any break in the flow of the stream of consciousness.

Transference is a yogic practice in which the initiate projects the consciousness-principle out of the crown of the head, or Aperture of Brahma.



Self-Liberation by Observing the Characteristics of the Symptoms of Death

If when dying one is able, one should examine the symptoms of death as they gradually occur obtaining Self-Liberation by Observing the Characteristics of the Symptoms of Death.

The Symptoms of Death include:

- Bodily pressures
- Clammy coldness as though the body were immersed in water, which gradually merges into a feverish heat
- The feeling that the body is being blown to atoms*
- Tingling in the extremities*
- Feelings of the body melting or flowing as if wax*
- Nausea*
- Trembling or shaking, beginning in the pelvic region and spreading up the torso*